



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

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### FINAL EIS ISSUED ON OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Deputy Under Secretary of the Interior Department William Horn today announced the availability of a final environmental impact statement on oil and gas exploration on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The FEIS also includes the preliminary final regulations for the proposed action. Both documents are part of a five-year study mandated by Congress.

Horn said no decision will be made on the alternatives examined in the environmental document for at least 30 days. The accompanying regulations establish guidelines for conducting exploratory activities on the 1.4 million acre study site, as required by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA).

"These regulatory guidelines are designed to prevent significant adverse effects on fish and wildlife, their habitat, and the environment," Horn said. "At the same time, they provide the needed flexibility for an efficient and effective exploration program that will provide the best information to Congress on the location, extent, and volume of oil and gas resources on the refuge."

ANILCA authorized exploration to obtain data and information on the oil and gas potential of the coastal plain study area in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is projected to bear 63.7 percent of the total oil and 49.4 percent of the total gas that will be found within the entire State of Alaska.

The guidelines are based on the results of the Baseline Study, a continuing comprehensive inventory of the fish and wildlife resources of the coastal plain, and other scientific information. They provide sound environmental safeguards, including measures to prevent unnecessary duplication of exploratory activities. They also protect proprietary geological and geophysical data while preserving the public's access to information obtained as a result of exploratory activities.

Horn emphasized that the final EIS and the regulatory guidelines, along with the Baseline Study, are part of the decisionmaking process in a five-year study. "The mandated study will culminate in a report to Congress between December 1985 and September 1986," Horn said. "That report will assess the coastal plains' oil and gas potential and the adverse effects that further exploration, development and production of oil and gas may have on the other resources of the refuge. Thereafter, the decision on the future use of the area is up to Congress." Leasing for oil and gas on the refuge is prohibited and would only be possible if authorized by Congress.

The final environmental impact statement examines four alternative strategies for regulating exploratory activities: government-prescribed operations; applicant-defined operation; no action; and the proposed action, a mix of alternatives one and two, that provides an intermediate level of guidance and control by establishing performance standards. It assesses the impacts of conducting seismic exploration under four methods, since this is one of the best methods allowed under the Act to estimate the location and volume of oil and gas resources. Magnetic and gravity methods, which do not require drilling, may be used to determine areas not worthy of detailed seismic exploration.

Consistent with the requirements of ANILCA, the preliminary final regulations as proposed in the EIS establish initial guidelines to govern the exploratory activities. They prescribe how to obtain approval to conduct exploratory activities and set limitations for the way such activities may be conducted.

Under the proposed action and regulatory guidelines, applicants must submit detailed exploratory plans that will be published in the Federal Register and general circulation newspapers in Alaska. Public hearings on the exploratory plans will also be held and comments received. After these hearings, all comments will be considered before a decision is made. The Alaska Regional Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service may approve, disapprove, or modify these plans. Special designated areas will be set off limits to exploratory activities for specific periods as the Regional Director deems necessary to protect calving and post-calving caribou, calving muskoxen, and staging snow geese. Exploration activities will be regulated to avoid any significant adverse effects to wildlife and damage to vegetation.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge contains about 18 million acres and is located in the extreme northeastern part of Alaska. The study area is limited to 1.4 million acres within the coastal plain of the refuge, immediately east of Prudhoe Bay. It provides habitat for the Porcupine and Central Arctic caribou herds on a seasonal basis, as well as for muskoxen, migratory birds, raptors, and fish.

The draft EIS was made available for public review and comment on September 17, 1982. The proposed draft regulations were published separately in the September 16, 1982, Federal Register. In addition to these requests for comments, two public hearings were conducted. The final EIS and preliminary final regulations reflect revisions made in response to the comments received.

The EIS was prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with technical assistance from the U.S. Geological Survey, Minerals Management Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. Copies are available for inspection in all public libraries in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau; the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation Library; Arctic Village Community Library; Kenai Community Library; and the North Slope Borough School District Library. Copies also have been sent to interested agencies and individuals. Single copies may be obtained from the Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Attn: 1002 EIS Task Force Leader), 1011 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503, and also from the Division of Refuge Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.